

Testament

by Alara Rogers

Category: StarTrek: Voyager

Language: English

Characters: Q

Status: Completed

Published: 1999-05-06 09:00:00

Updated: 1999-05-06 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 10:36:28

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,893

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Occurs during Death Wish. Q and Quinn discuss Quinn's decision to commit suicide.

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He turned the steak knife over and over in his hands, trying to figure out what it was that he was supposed to do with it. Or what he wanted to do with it. Somehow, as many times as he'd imagined achieving his goal, he'd imagined something painless and bloodless-- simply winking himself out of existence, for instance. Which hadn't worked the last several hundred times he'd tried it, though he was still sure it was theoretically possible. When he'd asked to be made mortal, mustered up the greatest and most eloquent arguments he could make, he had only been thinking that it was reasonably easy for a mortal to die... not the technical details of what that death would entail.

But here and now, he was forced to think about it. He hadn't been able to talk the machine into giving him anything poisonous, and there were no large bodies of water near a starship, and a brief query to the computer had revealed that the shuttle bay would not depressurize and open its doors if a life form was inside and not within a pressurized shuttle. That had rather disappointed him, as the notion of throwing himself off the ship and into the vastness of space had appeal. He had thought about hanging himself, but couldn't find anything to hang himself from, and jumping off a height was a little difficult when there weren't any heights aboard a starship, either.

So here he was, holding a steak knife, which he'd coaxed the

repli-thingy into giving him readily enough, and thinking about the usual human reaction to having fairly large bleeding holes cut in their skin, which was usually to scream hysterically and beg for the medic. This did not strike him as an appropriately dignified way to go. No, strike that-- it wasn't even the dignity that concerned him, he had to be brutally honest with himself. It was the pain. He had it on fairly good authority that, for all their superiority in many respects, his species was exceedingly bad at dealing with pain, on the very rare occasions when one of them actually had to endure it. And he, who was not afraid to die for his people, who had put up with 300 years of an incredibly unpleasant imprisonment for the sake of principle, found that he was positively terrified of suffering extreme physical discomfort.

Still, that wouldn't stop him. He took a deep breath. When you considered that the choices were to remain in this form, a form of imprisonment in some ways even more profound than the one he'd endured for 300 years, or to do this, and accomplish the purpose he'd striven for all that time... well, his path became fairly obvious. He set the knife against the flesh of his wrist.

"That's going to make an awful mess," a voice behind him warned.

He turned, startled, and startled that he was startled. He hadn't sensed the other's presence at all. Well, no more he should have, after all-- he was mortal now. The other continued. "You're going to get blood all over everything. Disgusting spurting arteries and all. Not to mention it's going to have to smart. Sure you want to go through with this?"

"I'm sure Captain Janeway will forgive the mess," Quinn said sincerely. "She seems to be a very understanding person."

"I don't know about that. Look at this carpet. You think they'll ever get the blood out? And it's not like they ought to go replicating a new one, consuming more of their scarce energy supplies. She rules in your favor, and what do you do but wreck her carpet? That's gratitude for you."

He sighed. "Q, if you're here to talk me out of it, you have to know it won't work... it didn't the last few hundred times someone tried, after all..."

"Talk you out of it? Hardly." Q pushed off from the wall, where he'd been leaning insouciantly, and walked over to Quinn, flinging himself down on the bed next to where he sat. "You're mortal now, after all. You've got nothing to look forward to but a long, slow, incredibly boring decline into decay. Certainly the only smart thing to do is opt out now."

Quinn smiled. "You sound almost passionate on the subject."

"I speak with the voice of experience," Q intoned darkly. "Being mortal is a positively miserable existence and no one sane would have chosen it in the first place."

"What about Q? She chose mortality."

"She's a pervert. A masochist. Anyway, she's cheating-- she gets to come home when her physical body dies. That's not mortality." He

glanced over at Quinn. "They told you about that?"

"I caught up on most of the news from home when I got out of that comet. How did you think I knew about _you?_"

Q considered that. "For some reason, it never occurred to me that you wouldn't know." He grinned. "Sheer egotism, I suppose. I assumed _everyone_ knew about me."

Quinn laughed at that. "Well, you are certainly very noticeable. Or... were, anyway." That thought made him a little sad.

Q sat up, his expression suddenly earnest. "It wasn't what you're thinking, Q."

"Quinn, please. "

Q rolled his eyes. "Whatever."

"And wasn't it?"

"It wasn't that political. I..." Q looked away. "Things haven't been great, these past three hundred years..."

"I did know about Azi." He saw Q stiffen, his posture hardening. "It was hard to miss, even where I was."

"Yes," Q said tightly, "I suppose it was at that." He lay back again, and stared at the ceiling. "I... they said at my trial that I grew excessive after that. That I was seriously out of control. It wasn't just a few harmless games, any more..." He looked back at Quinn. "I did things even I wasn't proud of. That was why they sentenced me."

Quinn knew what the other was trying to say. _I didn't betray my path. I didn't let them terrorize me into line. Their decision was right, and I accept it._ He could no longer read the sub-undertones that formed much of Q speech, but he didn't need to to understand what Q was saying. And he knew it was wrong. "I know all that," he said patiently. "But the results are the same, aren't they?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I mean that they used that as an excuse. From what I've picked up of the last three hundred years, I saw your excesses, yes, but I also saw you were starting to pull out of it on your own. You didn't really condemn the humans to their homeworld the way you threatened to do, now did you? You were starting to recover. And yes, perhaps you did deserve a quick taste of what it means to be mortal, to give you some sympathy for them. That was probably the right thing to do, and I can't say I'd have voted otherwise if they'd consulted me... but they've used it to compel your obedience since, haven't they, Q? You've been terrified of that, terrified of the possibility that next time, they'll make it permanent."

"I've defied the Continuum," Q protested. "When they wanted me to test the humans, I dropped hints..."

"Dropped hints!" Quinn exploded, getting up and pacing. "The Q I remember would loudly have declared that _he_ was in charge of

overlooking humanity, thank you very much, and could the Continuum kindly go stuff themselves. But you, you enacted a test you thought to be unnecessary, unwarranted, and fairly useless-- prove humans can deal with non-linear thinking, as if your human pet hadn't been dealing with temporal anomalies since before you met him. They didn't order you to do that because they really wanted humanity tested, Q; they gave humanity to you before you went to that human ship, what was its name..."

"Enterprise," Q supplied.

"Right. They did it to test you, to test your obedience."

"I'd have known."

"One of the things it's hardest for youngsters like you to realize is how easily your elders can block your access to the higher levels of their dialogue without you ever knowing there's anything to listen to."

"Giving away trade secrets, Q?" Q said mockingly.

"It's not my trade anymore," Quinn pointed out. "And then there's Amanda. What about her?"

"I didn't kill her."

"No, you didn't. But you would have. You argued that she should be tested rather than killed outright, yes, very brave of you. What happened to the Q who argued that her parents should have been blocked from using their powers, who flat-out accused the Continuum of trapping them in a no-win situation to engineer their deaths in retaliation for their daring to reproduce?"

"That Q promptly went out and condemned a shipful of hapless mortals to die for failing a test their species was inadequately equipped to handle," Q said tonelessly.

"Oh, yes, they've drummed your failings into you, and well they should, for you did have legions of failings. Like any young creature. But the pendulum's swung the other way, now. In trying to behave in a moral and responsible fashion, you have let the Continuum dictate to you, tried to convince yourself that they are completely correct in all that they do, because you can't bear the fear of being punished again. After all, what do you call your participation in this?"

"No." Q stood up. "That is going too far. I didn't participate in this little charade because the Continuum terrorized me into it, whatever you may think. I believed in the Continuum's position on this issue, and I still do."

Quinn merely looked at him. "You've always supported dissenters before."

"No dissenter has ever before wanted to commit suicide!" Q exploded.

Abruptly he calmed, smiling mockingly at himself. "Oh, you are talented. Even in this reduced state you're in, you can still push my

buttons. I'm impressed."

"Does my desire to die bother you that much?" Quinn asked gently.

Q began to pace, as if there were some law of conservation that said that one of them needed to be pacing at all times, and Quinn's stillness now compelled him. "You said there's nothing to say anymore. Nothing to do. That's not true. There's still millions of things to do-- interesting mortals to play with, species to observe, arguments to have. We have a Q child now who was born among mortals-- isn't that worth talking about?"

"It happened before. 30,000 years ago."

"Well, still. It's interesting. You were somewhat fond of humans before-- don't you want to stick around and see what happens to them?"

"Not really," Quinn confessed. "It amused me at the time, but... it's not really worth sticking around another several millenia for."

"I don't understand you." Q turned to face him. "Look, I'm bored, but that doesn't mean I want to die!"

"You're also several million years younger than me."

"So that's it? That's the big secret of our development? People have been harassing me all my life to grow up and develop some maturity so I can be bored out of my mind in several million years and kill myself, is that it?"

"Q, you can't take this personally. Not all Q my age want to die."

"No," Q said bitterly, "but a lot of the ones my age seem to want to." He paced again. "In the past eight hundred years, ten Q of my generation have died. Ten! Most of them through one form of blatant disobedience or another. I nearly became number eleven. Good friends of mine were among that ten, one of them..." He swallowed. "Anyway. I know that the masochist we were discussing earlier latched onto the notion of spending a human lifetime as a human because she was thinking of trying to kill herself before she had this utterly brilliant notion. Where does it end?"

"Hopefully, it ends with the Continuum growing, changing. Perhaps that's still possible. Perhaps we haven't reached the pinnacle of our achievement. Who can say?"

"Then why don't you stay?" Q's voice was almost pleading. "If you really think we might be able to progress further, why can't you stay alive? We might need you. If no one but you is even asking the questions, how are we going to find the answers when you're gone?"

Quinn sighed. How was he supposed to answer a question like that? He thought of pointing out that he'd done his part, put in millions of years already, and he was tired. He thought of pointing out that it wasn't his job, that he had tried to wake up the Continuum and had failed. It was someone else's turn now.

He didn't say any of that. "You're asking the questions now, aren't you?"

Q rolled his eyes. "As if anyone would listen to me."

"I think you're wrong." Quinn moved around to the younger one's side, leaning in toward his ear. "You have a talent for getting people's attention. You know that. If you felt passionately about something, you could make yourself heard."

"I could also get myself thrown out of the Continuum. A whole lot of good that would do anyone."

"Ah, no." Quinn shook his head. "That's not very creative of you, Q. It isn't necessary to make yourself heard by going about doing things you've been forbidden to do. What you have to do is think of things you haven't been forbidden to do that will upset the status quo. Things that will make people think. That would be worthy of you."

"I think you're putting an inordinate amount of faith in me," Q said dryly. "What makes you think I can convince the Continuum where you failed?"

"I don't."

"You don't?" Q's eyes widened.

Quinn shrugged. "I think the problem is immortality. Until a great number of Q recognize that they are too bored to go on, and make way for younger, less jaded Q to take their place, I don't think anything will change." He leaned forward and upward, staring directly into Q's eyes, one hand on the other's shoulder. "But you don't believe that's the answer. And that's good! There should be more conflict, more questioning, more ideas in the Continuum! The most opinionated, egotistical species in the universe, a species that thrived from its very earliest days on conflict and converse... and now we don't even talk to each other. You younger ones stage meaningless arguments with each other just to give you something to do. To many of us even that's gotten old. But it's what you thrive on, you and other Q like you, and if anyone can succeed in bringing it to the Continuum, it's you." He did not add that he didn't truly think anyone could succeed without an acceptance of death. Q didn't need to hear that, and probably knew Quinn's opinions on the subject already anyway.

"All right then!" Q's eyes were lit up for the first time since he'd arrived on this starship, apparently catching on to the excitement of Quinn's proposal. "So suppose I'm willing to do this. Suppose I'm willing to put myself back on the line to stir up trouble in the Continuum. And suppose it works. There are other Q who think like me, and a lot of Q who are dissatisfied with the way things are, whether or not they agree with my methods of changing it. I'm sure I could start a few arguments. Recruit others, get dialogue going, capture the attention of the rest of the Continuum..."

"Yes! That's exactly it!"

"So why do you still want to die?" Q asked triumphantly.

He put his own hand on Quinn's shoulder. "Listen, I know you're tired of dealing with the Continuum," he said in a low, seductively sympathetic voice. "But no one is saying you have to. Just stick around long enough for us to change things. If the Continuum stopped being boring, you wouldn't need to die."

Quinn looked up at him, and laughed, stepping away and sitting down. "You don't give up easily, do you, Q?"

Q shrugged. "A minor virtue."

"I'm sorry. But my answer's still the same. I'm unable to face the thought of living another day without being overwhelmed by a sense of hopeless ennui. And you want me to stay how long? How long do you think it will be before you can transform the Continuum? We're not talking about a change that will take place tomorrow, after all."

"Then just wait a human lifetime," Q said, the near-pleading note back in his voice. "You can do that, can't you? This form you're in probably has no more than 70 years left to it, less considering the rate Janeway's making friends and influencing people out here. You could do what she suggested, explore whatever it is mortality has to offer..."

"Didn't you just say a few minutes ago that mortality has nothing to offer?"

"It had nothing to offer me. Not in comparison to being a Q. And... if you must know... I might not have tried to kill myself if there hadn't been something out there that wanted me dead rather badly and didn't care about who it hurt to get to me... anyway, that's besides the point." He paced again. "What would it cost you, to stay alive in this form? You don't have enemies trying to hunt you down and kill you. You could do that guardian angel guidance stuff you like to do. You might even help these poor hapless people get home faster."

"I'm beginning to think you just don't want to see me die," Quinn said, amused.

"I'm just trying to make sure you understand the possibilities..."

"Q." Quinn caught his arm as he paced past. "Is that what this is? Because if it is, I'm very flattered. I know you don't concern yourself with the well-being of others lightly."

Q looked down at him and was silent a moment. Finally, harshly, he said, "But it still doesn't change your decision."

"I'm afraid not."

Q turned away, walking toward the wall. "I don't even know why I'm bothering," he said, still in the hard voice. He reached the wall and spun around, facing Quinn again. "Just tell me why. You can die anytime, now that you've won the decision. Why does it have to be now? Why can't you wait even a few years to see if things might change?"

"Because if I don't die, they never will change." Quinn stood up. "Q,

the Continuum won't care that I'm mortal. Plenty of us have been made mortal before, and died of it. If I live on as a mortal, and a few years later decide to kill myself, that's hardly a unique statement. You are by no means the first Q to contemplate suicide after being exiled, you know."

"Then what good does it do to kill yourself at all?"

"Everyone knows I chose mortality specifically so that I could die. If I don't follow through, now, it'll cheapen the power of my statement. Don't you understand? I'll just be a mortal, killing himself because he can't be a Q anymore. But if I do it now, it will still be interpreted as a Q killing himself." He stepped forward and reached out to Q, touching his arm gently. "The Continuum won't change if I don't do this. My message will be lost, and things will just go one, as they have since time immemorial. Someone needs to make a drastic change, to give the Continuum something to think about, something to talk about. And I decided 300 years ago that that someone would be me."

"You would think that I would understand that," Q murmured. "I'm no stranger to grandiose gestures myself..."

"I'm not asking you to be happy with my decision, Q. Just, please, accept it. And don't try to stop me."

"Who's trying to stop you?" Q said dully. "You made your decision. Far be it for me to interfere."

"I'm sorry this upsets you," Quin said sincerely. "I hope someday you'll be able to look back and say it was necessary. That this will be the catalyst the Continuum needs."

"If it isn't, I'll resurrect you and tell you I told you so."

Quinn did not take that seriously at all. He smiled at Q. "It will be."

He went back to the table and got his steak knife. "You're going to do that now?" Q asked in a horrified voice.

Quinn turned back to him, holding the knife. "Well, there's no time like the present," he said cheerily.

Q looked unwell. "Look, do me a favor and put that thing down, okay? I can't stand the notion of you bleeding all over the place, like any other useless mortal."

"It's not my favored choice either, but I'm open to suggestions..." A bottle materialized in Q's hand. "What is it?"

"It's called nogatch hemlock," Q said, as if he found the entire conversation distasteful. "Painless, efficient, slow enough to let you rehearse your speech again and fast enough that you won't get bored. Oh, and most importantly, completely incurable by Federation medical technology."

He looked away as Quinn took the bottle from his hand. "You didn't have to do this," Quinn said, surprised and grateful.

"Of course I didn't. If I had to, I'd have probably found some way to get out of it," Q said irritably. He looked back at Quinn. "It's just-- if you're bound and determined to do this anyway, and I can't talk you out of it... a Q should die with dignity."

"Thank you. I didn't expect this of you. Thank you very much."

"You'll pardon me," Q said, "if I don't watch."

And he was gone.

Quinn held the bottle, turning it over in his hands. "No, I didn't suppose you would, my friend," he murmured. "But the Continuum will. And maybe they'll learn something."

He uncorked the bottle, put it to his lips and drank.

End
file.